

## AJL Book Award Acceptance Speeches

**Amy Schwartz:  
Picture Book Award Winner**  
Introduction by  
Judy Greenblatt

When I tallied the vote for the Picture Book Award, of the five books that formed a group at the top, three were published by Kar-Ben Copies, a small, relatively new publishing house. I believe that Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler deserve special commendation for producing books of consistently high quality. I predict a Sydney Taylor Award for Best Picture Book will go to a book published by Kar-Ben Copies very soon. The fifth book was published by the Jewish Publication Society, which also produced our winner. JPS, under the guidance of David Adler, Editor of JPS Books for Young People, has been doing an outstanding job of publishing excellent books for children.

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### Jewish Children's Books (continued)

Spero, Moshe Halevi. *Zedyeh*. Simcha. An excellent book about dealing with death, with a very traditional outlook.

Wolitzer, Hilma. *Wish You Were Here*. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Bernie Segal, desperately lonely after the death of his father, has a secret plan to visit his grandfather in Florida.

### III. For Young Adults — Grades 7-10

Bober, Natalie S. *Breaking Tradition: The Story of Louise Nevelson*. Atheneum. The remarkable story of one of America's foremost sculptors; includes much on the development of Nevelson's art.

Cowan, Ida and Gunter, Irene. *A Spy for Freedom: The Story of Sarah Aaronsohn*. Lodestar. Sarah Aaronsohn grew up in Palestine and led a spy ring against the Turks during World War I.

Isaacman, Clara. *Clara's Story*, as told to Joan Adess Grossman. JPS. Another dimension is added to our knowledge of the Holocaust as we read Clara's story of survival in Antwerp.

Kresh, Paul. *Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Story of a Storyteller*. Lodestar. Emphasis on Singer's childhood in Poland.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Stories for Children*. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Its title notwithstanding, this is a wonderful book for teenagers, containing many of the elements present in Singer's writing for adults.

Tamar, Erika. *Good-Bye Glamour Girl*. Lippincott. Star-struck Liesl, a refugee from Vienna, finds out that growing up means not running away.

\* Award winners

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Judy Greenblatt is Librarian of Temple B'nai Israel in Toledo, Ohio and Chairman of the AJL Book Award Committee for Children's Literature.

*Of the five at the top, one book stood way above the rest. Each of us found the criteria of excellence were best met by Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks. Excellent writing, charming illustrations, and clear and positive Jewish values combine to produce a warm and delightful picture of the joys of Shabbat and of the value of observing mitzvot. Mrs. Moskowitz' problem is that she must give up the home in which she has spent the major portion of her adulthood. It is not a problem that is limited to Jewish grandmothers. Mrs. Moskowitz therefore has wide appeal beyond the Jewish community, which bespeaks the universality of the themes touched on. Thus many people outside the Jewish community will learn about our Shabbat and about Jewish values.*

*The author of Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks, Amy Schwartz, is a delightful Californian, who has taught art in her native state. Her home is now New York, where she has worked in the production department of a major publishing house. Ms. Schwartz has illustrated books, including one published this year written by Amy Hest, called The Crack of Dawn Walkers. She has also done illustrations for magazines and greeting cards. Her first book, Bea and Mrs. Jones, was widely acclaimed. It was a selection of public TV's Reading Rainbow, and was listed in the New York Times and in School Library Journal as one of the best picture books of the year. Ms. Schwartz's next book will be titled Begin at the Beginning.*

*Mrs. Moskowitz was the first of Amy Schwartz's works to be published by the Jewish Publication Society; the next, a Chelm tale, is due out in the fall. I hope these two will be the first of many. It gives me great pleasure to present to you the winner of AJL's Sydney Taylor Award for Best Picture Book, Amy Schwartz.*

### Remarks by Amy Schwartz

I'd like to thank the Association of Jewish Libraries for giving me this award. It is quite an honor.

In *Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks*, I wanted to express some of my feelings about the importance of a sense of home, and the idea that the holiday of Shabbat celebrates these feelings.

The book is about an older woman who moves into a new apartment. She desperately misses her old home. Mrs. Moskowitz feels so unhappy in her new apartment that

she cannot even bring herself to unpack. Then her son comes by with a box that was overlooked in the move. The box contains a pair of tarnished Sabbath candlesticks. These candlesticks bring up strong feelings and memories for Mrs. Moskowitz. They serve as catalysts that lead her into unpacking, cleaning, and, most important, feeling again. Mrs. Moskowitz sets up her apartment and prepares for Shabbat. She makes her apartment into a home.

The book began with a meeting with the juvenile book editor at the Jewish Publication Society, David Adler. My agent had shown David my artwork. David phoned me and invited me to come in and talk. He told me that he was interested in doing a picture-book about the Sabbath. I listened, and responded that, Oh yes, I was very interested. I'd have something to show him soon. I never tell a potential employer that I don't know how to do something.

It is an understatement to say that I was worried when I got home. I knew very little about Shabbat. And I'd never written anything from someone's suggestion. Nevertheless, I bravely put a sheet of paper in my typewriter. I typed out the word "Shabbat." Then I sat there. Then I typed two names, "Janet," and "Beth."

Janet Seckel and Beth Pearson were neighbors of mine when I moved to New York six years ago. They lived upstairs from me in a huge, impersonal, apartment building on the Upper West Side. Janet was working, Beth was a student, and they both were observant Jews.

I met them during what was a difficult time for me. I was new in New York. I had come looking for work illustrating children's books. Manhattan seemed to me to be a city of twenty-one-year-olds working in advertising, living in studio apartments, thinking only of window offices and how to dress for success. I desperately missed California. I missed my way of life there. I missed my home.

Then I met Janet and Beth. I loved visiting them. Their apartment felt different from any other apartment I'd been in in Manhattan. Something was usually cooking on the stove. We talked about feelings, friends, and family. Their apartment felt like a home.

I clearly remember the first time I visited on Shabbat. I remember finding Beth, who was in the middle of a difficult college semester, lying on her sofa, reading a novel. She explained to me that she kept the Sabbath.

No matter what was going on in the rest of her life, Beth told me, Shabbat was a day to relax and feel peaceful with herself. We talked about what Shabbat meant to her. I remember feeling deeply surprised, relieved, and happy that I'd found this peaceful retreat in the middle of Manhattan. Here, every week, Janet and Beth reaffirmed for themselves what was important. I thought perhaps this is why this apartment feels like a home.

Thinking about Janet and Beth and that first year in New York brought up more memories. I remembered one night when I couldn't sleep. I remembered getting out of bed and taking out my journal. I expected to write regretfully about friends I'd left in California, or of my worries about finding work. Instead, I found myself making a list similar to the list Mrs. Moskowitz makes when she is first left alone in her new apartment. "I miss my blue chair," I wrote, "I miss my sofa," and so on. When I was done, I felt comforted, and could fall asleep.

I also remembered my frequent trips back to California. I remembered returning to New York each time with a suitcase full of favorite things from home. Just as Mrs. Moskowitz begins to feel happy when she unpacks her candlesticks, as I unpacked each item, I felt just a little bit more at home.

The few words I'd typed out had brought up many feelings and memories, but they did not make up a picturebook. I was stuck. I talked to my agent. We decided that I was probably not the right person to write this book. I put the project aside.

Around this time another friend of mine, Nancy, was getting married. I bought her a little handmade pillow as a wedding present. It was very pretty. Before wrapping it, and giving it up to Nancy to put on *her* sofa, I decided to test it out on *my* sofa. It looked lovely sitting there. But, my sofa didn't measure up to the pillow. My sofa suddenly looked very shabby. And, somehow, now the picture above my sofa didn't look right either. My rug looked worn, and the pottery on the coffee table didn't look right either. I felt very agitated. I rearranged the pottery. I adjusted the picture. I swept the rug and cleaned the living room. When I was done, I felt centered and calm. And, I had a structure for my Sabbath story.

I wrote up a story proposal and sent it to David at JPS. He liked the proposal, and, with his help, I began writing *Mrs. Moskowitz*.

That's the story behind my story. *Mrs. Moskowitz* is a book about some simple

(continued in column 3)

**Uri Orlev:  
Children's Book Award Winner**  
*Introduction by  
Judy Greenblatt*

*This year, among the candidates for the Children's Book Award, was one whose author clearly shared our goals. Immediately after World War II, there was a great silence on the part of survivors as they attempted to come to terms with what they had experienced. After a period of many years, they slowly began to find their tongues. Uri Orlev is one who has found an eloquent and powerful voice indeed. It was a long time before he could give expression to his experiences.*

*Uri Orlev was born in Warsaw in 1931. His father was captured by the Russians at the start of the war, and Uri spent the years 1939-1941 hiding in the Warsaw ghetto, together with his mother and younger brother. His mother was killed, and he and his brother were sent to Bergen-Belson.*

*The Island on Bird Street, winner of AJL's Sydney Taylor Best Book Award for 1984, is the story of Alex, a boy left alone in a Polish ghetto, based on Mr. Orlev's childhood experiences. The horrors of war are clear, yet the point of view maintained is optimistic. Alex, age 11, survives the winter in a ruined house in the ghetto. Not blind hope, but faith based on the words of his parents and of his father's friend, Boruch, guide him through his darkest days. The Island on Bird Street was published in Hebrew in 1981, and won the Mordechai Bernstein Award for Children's Literature, given by Haifa University.*

*Mr. Orlev immigrated to Israel after the war, and at first worked on a kibbutz in the lower Galilee. He is the author of an adult novel, The Lead Soldiers, but for the past five years has concentrated on writing for children.*

*Mr. Orlev lives with his wife and three children in Jerusalem, so you will understand that he could not be with us tonight. He has, however, sent us a letter.*

**Remarks by Uri Orlev**

I wish to express my deep gratitude to your Association for presenting *The Island on Bird Street* with your Best Book Award.

I feel privileged to have been able in this book to share some of my experiences in the Holocaust with others.

I feel privileged to have been able to speak in it for all those who perished.

But perhaps, above all, I feel privileged to have demonstrated in it the total failure of

(continued in column 3)

**Miriam Chaikin:  
Body-of-Work Award Winner**  
*Introduction by  
Judy Greenblatt*

*The 1984 recipient of the Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award is Miriam Chaikin. Ms. Chaikin has won a place of deep affection and respect in all our hearts and minds, as well as in those of our children. When the books started to arrive at our door in great numbers last fall, my daughter Miriam—who was then ten—could be counted on to appear immediately after the mailman, asking longingly if another Molly book had arrived.*

*Miriam Chaikin was born in Jerusalem, grew up in Brooklyn—home of the Molly books—and now lives in Manhattan. She was brought up in a close-knit Orthodox family. This upbringing has been a major influence on her writing. That she feels holidays renew family ties and spirit, and link us with a shared past, is clearly evident in her work.*

*Earlier in her career, Ms. Chaikin worked for two U.S. Senators. She entered publishing via the subsidiary rights area, and was then a book editor and later editorial director for a major publishing house. Now a writer and a free-lance editorial consultant, Ms. Chaikin has authored the text of several picture books and has poems in various anthologies.*

*Molly, heroine of the series about a girl growing up in an Orthodox family in Brooklyn in the 1940s, initially appeared in I Should Worry, I Should Care, Miriam Chaikin's first novel. But the four Molly books have not*

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**Amy Schwartz (continued from column 1)**

feelings, but, to me, important ones. I'm happy that what has touched me has touched others also.

I'm grateful to the Jewish Publication Society for publishing my story. I'd like to thank my editor David Adler for his editorial help, his patience, and encouragement.

Thank you for inviting me here and thank you for this award.

**Uri Orlev: (continued from column 2)**

the Nazis to destroy the human spirit in even a little boy.

I am sorry to have been unable to attend this festive occasion and wish to thank you once more for the prize you have honored me with.